

新时代大学英语专业系列教材

英语国家概况

(英国和澳大利亚·分册)

**A Brief Introduction to Major English-speaking
Countries: The United Kingdom of Great Britain and
Northern Ireland and Australia.**

总 主 编 张维友 李亚丹

本书主编 张峻峰

副 主 编 庞影平 刘芳 张国华

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编审说明

本书按照时间顺序,以主题为主线介绍了英国和澳大利亚的概况。全书共分12章,前10章介绍英国,后两章是对澳大利亚基本情况的介绍。内容涉及介绍国的历史、社会、文化和当今的热点问题。每章的教学时数为2~4个课时。从教学的便利出发,每个章节由介绍、选读、问题讨论、练习(附有答案)和注释五个部分组成。

介绍部分的目的是让学生对本章节的内容有基本的把握,选读部分从深度和广度上对基本内容加深和拓展,问题讨论和练习则着眼于本章知识的运用和知识点的检查。本书内容翔实,教师可根据学生的具体情况对材料进行取舍。下列同志参加了本书的编撰工作:华中师范大学外国语学院张峻峰、刘芳、张国华和湖北中医学院外语部的庞影平。华中师范大学英语系美籍教师 **Megan Panther** 女士对本书书稿进行了审阅。由于水平有限,书中疏漏之处在所难免,望请各位专家、同行不吝指教。

新时代大学英语专业系列教材编审指导委员会

2005年1月

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Part One

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Unit 1 A General Survey of the United Kingdom

I. Introduction

Great Britain, the dominant industrial and maritime power of the 19th century, played and is still playing a leading role in many aspects such as advancing literature and science. At its zenith, the British Empire stretched over one-fourth of the earth's surface. The first half of the 20th century saw the U. K. 's strength seriously depleted in two world wars. The second half witnessed the dismantling of the Empire and the U. K. rebuilding itself into a modern and prosperous European nation. As one of five permanent members of the UN Security Council, a founding member of NATO, and a member of the European Community Union, the U. K. is currently weighing the degree of its integration with continental Europe. It is rather essential for us to learn about the country and the people that have been of great importance in its history.

The United Kingdom, an island country of constitutional monarchy in the northwest of Europe, faces the North Sea on the north and the east, and the Atlantic Ocean on the west, and is cut off from the European Continent by the English Channel on the south. Covering 94, 525 sq. mi. (244,820 sq. km.), the United Kingdom, consists of Great Britain (England, Wales, and Scotland) and Northern Ireland, which slightly exceeds the total land area of Guangdong and Hainan provinces in China. Therefore, the full name of the country is "the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland." However, for the convenience's sake, it is often shortened to Great Britain, Britain or incorrectly called England.

Before Ice Age, the United Kingdom was linked to the European Continent. The melting of glaciers and the resulting rise of the seas in the end of Ice Age separated them. The mainland of Great Britain is more than 1,000 km. from south to north and extends, at the widest part, about



500 km. from west to east. Its coastline runs 12,429 km. , making it one of the countries with the longest coastline. No matter where one lives in the island country, the sea is no more than 2 ~3 hours away. This principal physiographic feature— the deeply indented coast— contains excellent natural harbors and easy accessibility to deepwater shipping, a factor that has been decisive in the economic development and imperial expansion of England.

Excluding Ireland, the island of Britain can be divided roughly into two parts: a Highland Zone in the north and west and a Low Zone in the south and east. England, in the southeast part of the British Isles, is separated from Scotland on the north by the granite Cheviot Hills; from them the Pennine Chain of uplands extends south through the center of England, reaching its highest point in the Lake District in the northwest. To the west along the border of Wales—a land of steep hills and valleys—are the Cambrian Mountains, while the Cotswolds, a range of hills in Gloucestershire, extend into the surrounding shires.

England

England is the largest, the most crowded and the most populous portion of Great Britain. It has an area of more than 130,000 sq. km. which accounts for nearly 60% of the whole nation. In 2003, it was estimated that England made up 81.5% of the country's population(60,094,648). Almost one-third of the population lives in England's prosperous and fertile southeast and is predominantly urban and suburban—with about 7.2 million in the capital of London. London is dominant in the U. K. not only because of its size and population but also because of its political, financial, and cultural importance. This dominance led to the trend of using “England” and “English” when people in foreign countries mean “Britain” and “British”, which annoys people in Scotland and Wales.

The terrain of England is diverse. The northern and western portions are generally mountainous. The principal highland region, the Pennine Chain (or Pennines), forms the backbone of northern England, composed of several ranges extending south from the Cheviot Hills to the valley of the Trent River and numerous spurs, and extensions that radiate in all directions. A large portion of the area occupied by the Pennine Chain comprises the Lake District, one of the most picturesque regions in England. The Lake Poets in the 19th century, such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, drew their inspiration from this area of mountain, lake, and valley scenery. The western part of this central region is known as the Midlands; it contains an area that is known as the Black Country¹ because of its intensive industrial development. The Thames, 338 km. long, starts as a small stream in the Cotswold Hills, in the south of England, flows eastwards through London, and finally into the North Sea. The reach near its mouth becomes one of the busiest commercial routes in the world. It is the longest river in the U. K. , and it is of great commercial, recreational, and cultural importance.

People in England are usually called the English. In fact, they are a historically mixed people, so local customs and accents in England vary a great deal. For example, Yorkshiremen are blunt, caustic and no-nonsense people while the men of Kent are honest John Bulls². England and the English, or at least their rulers, have been the dominant power in the British Isles for a long time. Therefore, in the following study, we will focus primarily on England instead of Scotland,

Wales, or Britain as a whole. It is a good start for us to begin to understand the U. K. as a whole, within the limits of a single country.

Wales

Wales is the smallest of the three nations on the British mainland, though larger than Northern Ireland. Its area, 8,015 sq. miles, takes up less than 9% of the land area while its population covers merely 1.9% of the whole. Wales is almost entirely mountainous. The principal range is the Cambrian Mountains, which extend north and south through central Wales. Other major highland areas are the Brecon Beacons in the southeast and the Snowdon massif, in Snowdonia National Park in the northwest, which reaches an elevation of 1,085 m. (3,560 ft.), the greatest in England and Wales.

Wales is divided geographically into the industrial south, the central plateau and lakes, and the mountainous north of the farmers and tourists. The south of Wales is densely inhabited by two-thirds of the population of Wales. As it had rich coal deposits, coal-mining is a key industry for the Welsh, and it played an important role in Britain's industrial revolution. Consequently, the decreasing coal resources have been a major economic and cultural concern in recent years. Cardiff, the capital city of Wales, is a modern and vibrant city, which has been developed over the years. Once the largest coal exporting ports in the world, Cardiff's docks have been transformed into a modern, shiny bay area, complete with restaurants, cinemas, and the New Welsh National Assembly. About 80 percent of the land in Wales is used for agricultural purposes, and forests cover about 12 percent of the land. Livestock, primarily beef, dairy cattle, and sheep, are more important than crop cultivation.

Stereotypically, the Welsh are emotional, cheerful people, proud of their past, and welcoming to friends, but suspicious of foreigners, particularly the English. They are intensely characterized by an artistic temperament. The Welsh are very musical, with many world-famous singers. Welsh literature had a profound influence in medieval Europe, as it is the source both of Arthurian legend³ and that of the Holy Grail⁴. An annual national cultural festival of music, literature, and drama, the Eisteddfod, is held alternately in North and South Wales during the first week in August.

Scotland

Scotland, with an area of 78,760 sq. km. , occupies the northernmost section of mainland Britain. According to the demographics of 2003, 9.6% of the British are the Scots. Compared to other sections of Great Britain, the land features of Scotland vary significantly. With its many moors, loches, mountains, islands, and ancient castles, it is a beautiful country, popular not only with tourists seeking a remote summer vacation in Britain but also English skiers, as skiing is not possible in England.

There are three natural zones in Scotland: the Highlands and Islands in the north, the central Lowlands, and the southern Uplands. The Highland Zone includes many great mountain chains in the north, tilting downward from west to east. Ben Nevis, the highest peak in Britain, towers above the rest of the Grampians in the centre of this zone. The western part of Highlands

is a very beautiful region. Great sea-loches alternate with wild and empty hills, attracting large numbers of tourists and hunters. Loch Ness is a touring spot famous for its beauty and mysterious monster. The Highland Zone accounts for more than half of the total area of Scotland, but its soil is rugged, bare, and mountainous. Due to the land feature of the Highland Zone, crops cultivation gives way to stockbreeding, fishing, and tourism.

To the south of the Highlands lies the great valley which forms the Central Lowlands. Though this zone comprises only one-fifth of Scotland's total area, it contains three-quarters of the total population, as well as most of the Lowlands, industry, and commerce. Edinburgh, the capital city of Scotland, is renowned for its architectural variety and great castles. It is located in the west of the zone. Forty miles away from the capital is Glasgow, the largest city and chief centre of commerce and industry. Both cities possess internationally respected universities, dating from the 15th century.

Yet farther to the south are the Southern Uplands, a rolling moorland region with fertile river valleys, including Dumfries, Galloway, and the Borders regions lying south of the Southern Uplands fault. This geological fault line stretches from the northern tip of the Rhine of Galloway to Dunbar on the east coast, separating the Border Country from the industrialized landscapes of the Midland Valley to the north. The Southern Uplands includes several ranges of hills, such as Galloway Hills, Roxburgh, and Cheviot Hills, as well as deeply incised river valleys such as Annandale, Eskdale, Liddesdale, and Lauderdale, all of which form important routeways. Dominated by sedimentary rocks of the Ordovician and Silurian periods, the hills of the Southern Uplands are generally rounded and often covered by peat. The area is also famous as the stamping ground of poet Robert Burns and admired historical novelist Sir Walter Scott, many of whose epic stories are set here.

The Scots have far more control over their own affairs than the Welsh. They have their own legal system, educational system, religion, and administration. Scotland has never been united with England in the same way as Wales. Their national consciousness is so strong that they have maintained their unique dress. They have also struggled continuously for self-government since they joined Great Britain by Act of Union in 1707⁵. The Scots historically were great empire-builders and fierce soldiers. Over the centuries, enemy troops were often terrified at the sight of Highlanders in kilts marching into battle, accompanied by the bloodcurdling music of the bagpipes. From their kilts and bagpipes, they got nicknames of "devils in skirts" and "ladies from hell". The typical Scotsman is also famous for his hard-working, serious-minded, and economical nature. But most visitors to modern Scotland come away with an impression that the people are hospitable, generous, and friendly.

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland is the smallest of the four parts of the U. K. both in area and population. Facing England across the Irish Sea on the northeast and bordering on the Republic of Ireland on the southwest, it covers 14,147 sq. km. and accommodates 2.4% of the total population. Though small, Northern Ireland is of great importance, in part because of its political troubles, which will be elaborated in a later unit.

Northern Ireland is a pretty area in the shape of a basin, with mountains in the north and south, Lough Neagh in the centre, a beautiful lake district in the southwest, and a rugged coastline. Among all the mountains, the Mourne Mountains is the literators' favorite. As the largest freshwater lake, Lough Neagh attracts abundant yachts and excursionists. It is said that the picturesque lake flows from a torrential spring. Like the lake, the lunar landscape of the Giant's Causeway, lurking below the gaunt sea wall where the land ends, must have struck wonder into the hearts of the ancient Irish, demonstrated by a wide range of legends about it. Due to the mountainous terrain, Northern Ireland is primarily agricultural and its industry is densely located along the coastline. Belfast, the capital and robust northern metropolis of nearly a third of Northern Ireland's population, has much in common with Liverpool and Manchester, the breezy cities across the Irish Sea. Belfast was the engine-room that drove the whirring wheels of the industrial revolution in Ulster. The development of industries like linen, rope-making, and shipbuilding doubled the size of the town every ten years since the industrial revolution. The world's largest dry dock is here and the shipyard's giant cranes tower over the port.

An Overview of Weather in the U. K.

With its unique geographic location and physiographic features, the United Kingdom has a much milder and more temperate climate than that of many places at the same latitude. Influenced by the North Atlantic Drift and the southwesterly winds, there are few temperature extremes, rarely rising above 32°C (90 F) or falling below -10°C (14 F). There are only small differences between the four seasons in the U. K. Despite this lack of extremes, day-to-day weather is so variable that even the most reliable British weather experts find it hard to offer an exact weather forecast, frequently using words like "variable" and "unstable" in their forecasts. It is no wonder that the British like to greeting with each other by talking about the weather.

Another feature of the British weather is abundant rainfall, and most residents carry umbrellas with them most of the time. Rainfall is fairly evenly distributed throughout the year, with March to June the driest period and September to January the wettest. Average annual precipitation varies from 1,600 mm (63 inches) in the mountainous areas of the north and west to less than 800 mm (32 inches) over central and eastern areas. It either rains or drizzles throughout the year. During May, June, and July, the months of longest daylight, the amount of sunshine varies from five hours in northern Scotland to eight hours in the Isle of Wight. During the months of shortest daylight (November, December, and January) sunshine is at a minimum, with an average of an hour a day in northern Scotland and two hours a day on the south coast of England. Naturally, a sunbath on holiday is cherished by the British.

Dense fog compounds the dim, drizzly, and unpredictable weather. Since the industrial revolution, the excessive use of imperfectly combusted coal, with the lack of wind and atmospheric humidity, contributed greatly to a shift from dense fog to unhealthy and dangerous smog. Fortunately, strict regulations were carried out and great efforts were made. Consequently, the pollution has been reduced.

II. Selected Readings

Activity 1: *Read the following introduction and discuss the questions with your partner.*

1. What impression does this article give of England?
2. What events can you enjoy in England if you are interested in sports?
3. How much will a day of sightseeing in London cost?
4. What attractions would you visit while traveling in England? Why?
5. What plant and animal life can you find in England?
6. Describe the transportation system in England in your own words.

England

(Source: Abridged from *Lonely Planet World Guide* <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/europe/england/index.htm>)

Until recently England was generally thought of as a gentle, fabled land freeze-framed sometime in the 1930s, home of the post office, country pub and vicarage. It's now better known for vibrant cities with great nightlife and attractions, contrasted with green and pleasant countryside.

From Stonehenge and Tower Bridge to Eton and Oxford, England is loaded with cherished icons of a past era. But it also does modernity with a confidence and panache left over from its days in the never-setting sun. Fashion, fine dining, clubbing, shopping—England's rates with the world's best.

England is looking forward into the new century while trying to forget many of the developments of the previous 100 years. That period witnessed the fall of the empire, the loss of the trading base and the nation's inability to adjust to a diminished role in the modern world—from colonial empire to member of the EC. But while the Family may have taken a right Royal battering, many of the other august institutions at the cornerstone of British life have muddled their way through with a stiff upper lip and a strong sense of protocol.

Full country name: England

Capital City: London

People: Anglo-Saxons, Scots, Welsh, Irish, West Indians, Pakistanis, Indians

Language: English

Religion: Church of England, Methodist, Baptist, Catholic, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh.

Government: Parliamentary Democracy

Head of State: Queen Elizabeth II

Head of Government: Prime Minister Tony Blair

GDP: U. S. \$ 1.25 trillion

GDP per capita: U. S. \$ 22,800

Inflation: 2.7%

Major Industries: Banking and finance, steel, transport equipment, oil and gas, coal, tourism

Major Trading Partners: EU (especially Germany, France, Netherlands, Ireland), USA

Facts for the Traveler

Visas: Citizens of the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa do not need a visa for stays in the U.K. up to 6 months, but they are prohibited from working. Citizens of the European Union (EU) don't need a visa to enter the country and may live and work here freely.

Time: GMT/UTC 0 (Greenwich Mean Time (British Summer Time during daylight savings))

Dialling Code: 44

Electricity: 240V, 50Hz

Weights & measures: Metric

When to Go

July and August are the busiest months, and best avoided if at all possible. The crowds on the coast, at the national parks, in London and popular towns like Oxford, Bath and York have to be seen to be believed.

Events

For the sporty, the traditional Oxford/Cambridge University Boat Race is held in London on the River Thames in late March/early April; the famous but gruelling Grand National steeplechase takes place at Aintree, Liverpool, on the first Saturday in April; the FA Cup final takes place in May; Lawn Tennis Championships, complete with strawberries and cream and tantrums by major players, take place at Wimbledon in late June; the champagne-quaffing set head for the Henley Royal Regatta at Henley-on-Thames also in June; and the Cowes Week yachting extravaganza pushes off on the Isle of Wight in late July/early August.

Those uninterested in ball games and fast-moving animals should check out the Chelsea Flower Show at London's Royal Hospital in May; the Trooping of the Colour pageantry on the Queen's birthday in London in mid-June; the bacchanalian Glastonbury Festival music extravaganza which swamps Glastonbury's paddocks in June; and the riotous (in the best possible sense) Caribbean carnival in London's Notting Hill in late August.

Money & Costs

Currency: pound sterling

Meals

Budget: 3–7

Mid-range: 7–16

High: 16+

Lodging

Budget: 10–30

Mid-range: 32–65

High: 65+

England can be extremely expensive and London in particular can be a big drain on your

funds. While in London you will need to budget at least GBP32.00 for bare survival (dorm accommodation, a one-day travel card and the most basic sustenance). Even moderate sightseeing or nightlife can easily add another GBP20.00 to this. If you stay in a hotel and eat restaurant meals you could easily spend GBP65.00 a day without being extravagant. Once you get out of the big smoke the costs will drop, particularly if you have a transport pass and if you cook your own meals. You'll still need at least GBP30.00 a day, and if you stay in B&Bs, eat one sit-down meal a day and don't stint on entry fees, you'll need about GBP70.00 a day.

Cashpoints (ATMs) are very common in Britain; most are linked to major credit cards as well as the Cirrus, Maestro and Plus cash networks, but if a machine swallows your card it can be a nightmare. Most banks insist on chopping it in half and sending it back to your home branch — very helpful.

If you eat in an English restaurant you should leave a tip of at least 10% unless the service was unsatisfactory. Waiting staff are often paid derisory wages on the assumption that the money will be supplemented by tips. Some restaurants include a service charge on the bill, in which case a gratuity is unnecessary. Taxi drivers expect to be tipped about 10%, especially in London. You never tip to have a pint poured in a pub. However, at swank cocktail bars a 10% tip is expected.

Attractions

London—The grand resonance of its very name suggests history and might. Its opportunities for entertainment by day and night go on and on. It's a city that exhilarates and intimidates, stimulates and irritates in equal measure, a grubby Monopoly board studded with stellar sights.

London is one of the favourite urban haunts of visitors to Europe because of landmark sights like Big Ben, St Paul's Cathedral and the historically rich Westminster Abbey. The city also boasts some of the world's greatest museums and art galleries, and more parkland than most other capitals.

Canterbury Cathedral—The most impressive and evocative, if not the most beautiful, cathedral in England is the seat of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Primate of All England. Like most cathedrals, it evolved in stages and reflects a number of architectural styles, but the final result is one of the world's great buildings. The ghosts of saints, soldiers, and pilgrims fill the hallowed air, and not even baying packs of French children can completely destroy the atmosphere. After the martyrdom of Archbishop Thomas Becket in 1170, the cathedral became the centre of one of the most important medieval pilgrimages in Europe, a pilgrimage that was immortalised by Geoffrey Chaucer in the *Canterbury Tales*. Canterbury itself was severely damaged by bombing in WWII and parts of the town have been insensitively rebuilt, but it still attracts flocks of tourists, just as it has for the past 800 years—though numbers may decrease now pilgrims are charged a fee to enter the cathedral.

Durham —It is the most dramatic cathedral city in Britain. It straddles a bluff surrounded on three sides by the River Wear and is dominated by the massive Norman cathedral which sits on a wooded promontory, looking more like a time-worn cliff than a house of worship. The cathedral may not be the most refined in the land, but no other British cathedral has the same impact. The cathedral shares the dramatic top of the bluff with a Norman castle and the University College,

while the rest of the picturesque town huddles into the remaining space on the teardrop-shaped promontory.

Lake District—The most green and pleasant corner of a green and pleasant land, the landscapes of the Lake District are almost too perfect for their own good: 10 million visitors can't be wrong, but they can sure cause a few traffic jams. The area is a combination of luxuriant green dales, modest but precipitous mountains and multitudinous lakes. Be prepared to hike into the hills, or visit on weekdays out of season if you have any desire to emulate the bard and wander lonely as a cloud.

Oxford—Arguably the world's most famous university town, Oxford is graced by superb college architecture and oozes questing youthfulness, scholarship and bizarre high jinks. The views across the meadows to the city's golden spires are guaranteed to appear in 30% of English period dramas, but they manage to remain one of the most beautiful and inspiring of sights. Back in the real world, Oxford is not just the turf of toffs and boffs: it was a major car-manufacturing centre until the terminal decline of the British car industry and is now a thriving centre of service industries. The pick of the colleges are Christ Church, Merton and Magdalen, but nearly all them are drenched in atmosphere, history, privilege and tradition. Don't kid yourself. You wouldn't have studied any harder in such august surroundings.

Stonehenge—It's the most famous site in prehistoric Europe, and is both a tantalising mystery and a hackneyed tourist experience; tantalising because no one knows why the stones were dragged up from South Wales 5000 years ago; hackneyed because tourists are processed through Stonehenge like cans on a conveyor belt. It consists of a ring of enormous stones topped by lintels, an inner horseshoe, an outer circle and a ditch. Although aligned to the movements of the celestial bodies, little is known about the site's purpose. What leaves most visitors gobsmacked is not the site's religious significance but the tenacity of the people who brought some of the stones all the way from South Wales. It's estimated that it would take 600 people to drag one of these 50-ton monsters more than half an inch. The downside of Stonehenge is that it's fenced off like a dog compound; there are two main roads slicing past the site; entry is via an incongruous underpass; and clashes between new age hippies and police at summer solstice have become a regular feature of the British calendar. Each year New Age Druids celebrate the summer solstice, but closer access at other times is strictly limited.

The Cotswolds—This limestone escarpment overlooking the Severn Vale is an upland region of stunningly pretty, gilded stone villages and remarkable views. Unfortunately, the soft, mellow stone and the picturesque Agatha Christie charm have resulted in some villages being overrun by coach tourists and commercialism.

York—For nearly 2000 years York has been the capital of the north, and it played a central role in British history under the Romans, Saxons, and Vikings. Its spectacular Gothic cathedral, medieval city walls, tangle of historic streets, and glut of teashops and pubs make it a great city for ambling around. York is a fascinating city of extraordinary cultural and historical wealth. Its medieval spider's web of narrow streets is enclosed by a magnificent circuit of thirteenth-century walls. The city is thick with museums tracing its long history, and, especially in summer, is a

tourist honeypot.

Isles of Scilly—These balmy rocky islands, slap in the middle of the warm Gulf Stream, have a pace of life just one slow heartbeat away from total extinction. There are no cars on any of the five inhabited islands, but all have white, sandy beaches, gin-clear waters and a swag of shipwrecks for treasure-loving divers.

New Forest—Wedged between Southampton and Bournemouth on the holiday South Coast, this huge patch of woodland is the largest area of natural vegetation left in England. It has been that way since William the Conqueror gave the area its name in 1079.

Northumberland—This is one of the wildest and least-spoilt counties in England. There are probably more castles and battlefield sites here than anywhere else in the country, testifying to the long and bloody struggle with the Scots. The most interesting and well-known relic is Hadrian's Wall. The Northumberland National Park has a windswept grandeur that is distinctly un-English in character. The grassy Cheviot Hills, part of the park, are a lonely, beautiful and challenging hiking area. The main town in the area is Berwick-upon-Tweed, the northernmost town in England; the prettiest villages are Corbridge and Brampton in neighboring Cumbria.

Shropshire—The blue remembered hills of Shropshire form one of the most beautiful, peaceful and underrated areas of Britain. The gentle terrain and the low population density make it perfect cycling or open walking country, and the county's capital, Shrewsbury, is probably the finest Tudor town in England.

Activities

England may be densely populated but it is also crisscrossed by footpaths and rights of way, which provide access to just about every nook and cranny of the country if you want to take a short stroll. The more energetic should tackle at least one long-distance walk. Cycling is another great way to get off the beaten track. England might not spring to mind when you're planning a beachside break but the southwest has some lovely beaches that offer excellent swimming and surfing.

Culture

England's greatest artistic contributions have come in the fields of theatre, literature and architecture. The country is also, right or wrong, a treasure house of art and sculpture, from every age and continent.

Anyone who has studied English literature at school will remember ploughing through Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dickens and Morrissey, and painful though it might have been at the time, no one can deny England's formidable contribution to the Western literary canon. The heavy weights of modern English fiction are Peter Ackroyd, Martin Amis, Julian Barnes, AS Byatt, Margaret Drabble, Ian McEwan and Jeanette Winterson.

Though England is not famous for the quality of its cuisine, London's recent renaissance in quality is spreading to the provinces. Travellers will find a remarkable variety of dining options from all over the world, though those on a budget should be wary of overdosing on fish and chips, eggs and bacon, and sausages and mash.

Most visitors are overwhelmed by the stately homes of the aristocracy, and England's fine collection of castles and cathedrals. Though motorways, high rise and tawdry suburban development characterize England's 20th century architectural heritage, modern architects like Sir Norman Foster and Richard Rodgers are creating dramatic and innovative structures like the Tate Modern, Millennium Bridge and Lloyds of London building.

Environment

England is no more than 29km (18mi) from France across the narrowest part of the English Channel. Much of England is flat or low-lying. In the north is a range of limestone hills, known as the Pennines, to the west are the Cumbrian Mountains and the Lake District. South of the Pennines is the heavily populated Midlands, and in the southwest peninsula, known as the West country, is a plateau with granite outcrops, good dairy farming and a rugged coastline. The rest of the country is known as the English Lowlands, a mixture of farmland, low hills, an industrial belt and the massive city of London.

England's national parks cover about 7% of the country and include Dartmoor, Exmoor, the Lake District, the Peak District, the Yorkshire Dales, the North York Moors, the New Forest, the Broads and Northumberland. English national parks are not wilderness areas, but they do include Areas of Outstanding National Beauty (AONB)—they also tend to be privately owned and provide an antidote to the hectic pace of many cities.

England was once almost entirely covered with woodland, but tree cover is now the second lowest in Europe (after Ireland). Since early this century the government has been planting conifers to reverse this situation, but the pines have turned the soils around them acid and destroyed large areas of ancient peatland. Other common trees include oak, elm, chestnut, lime (not the citrus variety), ash and beech. Although there isn't much tall flora around, you'll see plenty of lovely wildflowers in spring—snowdrops, daffodils, bluebells, primroses, buttercups and cowslips all lend a touch of colour to the English countryside. On the moors there are several varieties of flowering heathers.

The red deer is the largest mammal in England, and there are plenty of them (as well as fallow and roe deer) around. Foxes prosper, and if you're lucky you may see a badger or hedgehog. Introduced American grey squirrels are forcing out the smaller local red variety. Rabbits are everywhere, while smaller rodents such as the shrew, harvest mouse and water vole are less common (but frightfully cute). England's only poisonous snake, the adder, is rare and protected. Bird-watching is a popular pastime in Britain, but while the numbers and diversity of coastal bird species do not appear to be in danger, the same cannot be said for other British birds—a number of species that were quite common only 25 years ago are rapidly dwindling because of habitat destruction.

England's climate is mild and damp, with temperatures moderated by the light winds that blow in off its relatively warm seas. Temperatures inland don't get much below freezing in winter (December to February), or much above 30 °C (86 F) in summer (June to August). The north is the coldest area; London, the southeast and the West Country are the warmest. Rainfall is greatest in hilly areas and in the West Country. You can expect cloudy weather and light drizzle in any